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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MOPS](#) [AF](#) [NL](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/ISAF: STAGE III PLANS STILL ALIVE

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Chat Blakeman,
reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: The Dutch government has not yet made a decision on participation in ISAF Stage III in Uruzghan province. Prime Minister Balkenende, Foreign Minister Bot and Defense Minister Kamp decided November 23 to postpone a decision on Dutch participation until Balkenende returns the following week from his trip abroad. As a result, the Dutch government has a brief window over the next few days to work with the United States "and others" to try and salvage Dutch participation in Stage III. MOD officials confirm that Stage III plans are still alive but contingent on two points: continued U.S. presence at firebases in the north and a "maneuver force" in Zabol province to the east -- but these details are open to negotiation. According to National Security Advisor Rob Swartbol, "to put this behind and just walk away is simply not an option". End summary.

Washington Phone Calls

2. (C) According to Joop Nijssen (Deputy Director, MFA Conflict Prevention Division), the Dutch viewed phone conversations between D and FM Bot, and P and Dutch Ambassador to the United States Eenennaam on November 22 as "positive signals". Nijssen said the Dutch government took a basic message away from the conversations: do not make any rash, negative decisions at this time.

Balkenende-Bot-Kamp Meeting

3. (C) National Security Advisor Rob Swartbol confirmed November 23 that Balkenende, Bot, and Kamp met to discuss Stage III plans. As a result, Swartbol said the three agreed to postpone a decision on Dutch participation in Stage III until Balkenende returns next week from his trip to Suriname. Swartbol and MFA Deputy Director for Political Affairs Peter de Gooijer said this afforded the Dutch government a brief window to work the issue over the next few days with the United States "and others". Swartbol noted that "to put this behind and just walk away is simply not an option."

MOD Side of the Story

4. (C) DAO contacts at the MOD concurred that the Balkenende-Bot-Kamp meeting kept open the possibility of Dutch participation in Stage III. They said that while the Dutch military supports deployment, Kamp continues to push for two points: a continued U.S. presence at firebases to the north of Uruzghan province, and a "maneuver force" in Zabul province to the east. MOD contacts suggested that the duration and numbers of this U.S. presence to the north and east are negotiable, and added that the Dutch might look to eventually deploy their own special forces to the two locations in the north while requesting NATO to look at finding an ally to take the maneuver force to the east.

Comment:

5. (C) The window on Dutch participation in Stage III is still open, and PM Balkenende is trying hard to make it happen. The read-out from the Balkenende-Bot-Kamp meeting tracks with what MOD Director for General Policy Affairs Lo Casteleijn said last week: the Dutch government has realized how damaging a pull-out from Stage III would be to Dutch political and military prestige. If the Secretary does call Bot on November 25 as planned, it would present an excellent opportunity to shore up Bot's confidence. Bot will also be looking for the Secretary to press Afghanistan President Karzai to enhance civil administration efforts in Uruzghan.

BLAKEMAN